

Cooperatives, Control or Compromise? The Changing Role of Participation in Norwegian Housing

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Introduction

What does it mean to participate and how is it relevant today? Participation used to be a democratic pursuit, conducted for the greater good of society; today, however, the motives and intentions behind it are not necessarily so simple. This paper will present examples of community participation in Norwegian housing, through which early egalitarian impulses can be seen to clash with the more recent intentions of private developers and a public desire for detached family homes.

In Norway, there is a proud history of participatory design. Following the First World War, reformers sought to improve society through informing the public about the importance of housing for health. By the 1970s, the reasons for participation changed from simply educating the public to actively seeking its approval. This gave rise to experiments in collective design, resulting in both flexible and communal solutions. The development of greater flexibility was seen to represent a democratic society and eventually led to bespoke flexibility, whereby individual families could participate directly in the design of their new homes without the necessity of sharing the services of an architect or a plot with others. Since the 1980s, there has been a dramatic increase in the number of private developers, which has seen the intentions behind public participation change. In turn, there have been mutterings, in both professional and academic circles, as to the advantages of participation. Questions have been raised regarding whom it benefits,¹ what difference

it makes,² and whether people actually want to take part.³

Early attempts at participatory design took inspiration from 'The Ladder of Citizen Participation' (1969).⁴ In this seminal paper, Sherry Arnstein graded levels of participation hierarchically. At the lowest rung of the ladder was manipulation, and at the top, full citizen control. It implied that participation should give decision-making and managerial power to the public. As such, whilst Arnstein's Ladder sought social equality, ideal participation would most likely be time-consuming for those involved. Participation could seem like a daunting prospect for anyone considering whether or not to take part, and the perceived intensity might subsequently lead those who invest their time to expect benefits such as full decision-making control. However, if everyone who participates expects control then there is little room for compromise.

In Scandinavia, there have long been efforts to realise liberated and egalitarian societies. As a result, local communities in Norway are encouraged to take part in discussions regarding the development of their local neighbourhoods. This does not, however, mean that they contribute directly to decision-making. There is also a tradition of staging community volunteering events to assist with construction, gardening or repair work. These events are called *dugnads* and generally involve a group of people painting or building something together over a day or two.

Whilst there is a tradition encouraging participation, which is fully supported by egalitarian and open governance, and demonstrated in the prevalence of volunteering events, Norway remains an extremely individualistic society. The country has an overwhelmingly rural tradition and a low population density, which means that, except for town centres, neighbours have rarely been a problem. The situation is, however, changing; desirable development land is diminishing as the population grows. As further densification takes place, agreement and compromises will need to be sought. This leads to questions relating to how a highly individualised society can participate now and into the future.

As of today, the few lines dedicated to participation in Norwegian planning legislation are vague, stating simply that provision ought to be made.⁵ Given the brevity of the text, it is perhaps curious that it instructs that children and those less able to participate directly are already accommodated for, inferring by their omission that it is not something that the general public needs be involved in.

In this paper, the history of participation in Norwegian housing design will be traced through a number of examples. The story begins with informing and consulting the public (Risvollan), then explores idealistic participation in shaping a community (Selegrend), before communal aspirations were put to one side in favour of customising and building individual family houses (Bromstad), which was followed by a trend of 'building your own home'. More recently, in the hands of developers, participation has become a tool for market canvassing and propaganda (Elvehavn Brygge). With the pressures of this period of growth comes the risk that participation may be used as a tool to convince people about issues that have already been decided.

Participation

'Participation' is a word that has been used a lot lately. What does this word mean today after it has been turned into a cliché so many times? How can people participate?⁶

(Hans Ulrich Obrist)

When discussing degrees of participation, Sherry Arnstein's 'Ladder of Participation' is a key text.⁷ The ladder describes a hierarchy of eight rungs of participation, ranging from manipulation at the bottom, to therapy, informing, consultation, placation, partnership and delegated power to citizen control at the top.

Arnstein's ladder was developed in an attempt to redress the power imbalance between those in power and the 'have-nots': those who 'have become so offended and embittered by their powerlessness to deal with the profound inequities in their daily lives.'⁸ The solution proffered by Arnstein was to give the 'majority of decision-making seats, or full managerial power' to the have-not citizens.⁹

The rungs on the ladder symbolise the range between non-participation, tokenism and citizen power; it is a linear, hierarchical model. The higher the rung on the ladder, the better the participation. Whilst relevant in its time, this approach does not necessarily ring true today, since notions of hierarchy have been superseded by the emergence of networks. Problems are no longer necessarily understood to be predictable, controllable or indeed linear. With regard to the ladder, this suggests that consulting or informing the public need not be tokenistic. In turn, wholesale citizen power is not the only desirable form of participation. However, as the public negotiate their work-life balance, participation might not seem like a valuable use of time. This, in turn, may lead to those who do participate to expect to get back something of perceived value from the process.

Naturally, Arnstein was working within the scope of her day, when committees held power; she had no way of knowing how advances in technology would break down the established hierarchy and enable individuals to seize greater power. Since the 1990s, the public has been empowered through the free availability of affordable media technologies and online information. As Meissen and Basar discuss in *Did Someone Say Participate? An Atlas of Spatial Practice*, this empowerment has seen in turn 'an explosion of self-initiated cultural production'.¹⁰ For those wishing to design their dream home, the Internet provides instruction, inspiration, tools and software,¹¹ negating the need for an architect, or equivalent professional. Experts are no longer needed and, as such, no single point of view is necessarily the best. The growing availability of information and media technologies has, in many ways, levelled the field between people, the public and experts.

The Norwegian 'build your own home' trend (which will be discussed later in this paper) may be seen as a precursor of this levelling. It gave decision-making control to the house buyer (or builder). In some ways it may be viewed as a logical outcome of participation in that it gave the public control. This control, ironically perhaps, led to a desire for less interaction between neighbours and communities. In turn, more recent attempts at participation regarding denser, urban sites may be seen to have subverted the early earnest intentions of participation and to have turned it into a means of gaining political leverage.

Scepticism may continue to grow toward public participation in Norway if it is seen primarily as a means of gaining control and exerting influence. There is, however, a potential for thinking about participation in a different way. By transporting Nicolas Bourriaud's ideas from largely art-world related aesthetics to the domain of urban/architectural practice, today's participatory turn can take an

alternate approach. Instead of allocating control, participation can allow for the exploration of relationships and context within the city. Bourriaud has described the aesthetics surrounding these new forms of participation as relational.¹² His writings, heavily influenced by Felix Guattari, posit that relational aesthetics operates in and between human interactions and social context. Thus, instead of aiming to construct the world according to preconceived ideals, participation now gives us a chance to learn how to occupy the world in a different way.

Bourriaud's approach does not seek to alienate the public by being directly critical of current society. As he writes, 'any stance that is 'directly' critical of society is futile, if based on the illusion of a marginality that is nowadays impossible, not to say regressive'.¹³ This suggests that neutrality is an important feature; knowledge is not achieved through critiquing the existing situation with a view to changing it, but by accepting context and history and developing relationships therein.

Participation in Norwegian housing

In the years following the First World War, a great amount of new housing was constructed in Norway. These large-scale works were, in part, instigated by the Norwegian Association for Housing Reform (Norskforening for boligreformer 1913-35), who sought to remedy what they saw as a proliferation of low quality, overcrowded, dense housing. In order to effectively communicate their ideals, they staged public exhibitions, published books and conducted lecture tours.¹⁴

The housing cooperative movement, which began towards the end of the 1920s, continued to gain strength in the 1930s, and in the years following the Second World War the Norwegian State Housing Bank was established. It supported share-owning cooperatives, *boligbyggelag*, where each resident was an indirect (or part) owner. As discussed by the Norwegian economist Mary Ann Stamsø, it acted

as an 'alternative to outright homeownership and tenancy as it gave tenants an individual right of use and a collective property right'.¹⁵

Since the establishment of the bank in 1946, over a million Norwegians have been or are customers, with a little over half of the nation's homes financed by the housing bank. Hence it has played a defining role in day-to-day life.¹⁶

In the 1970s, Norway constructed the largest number of new residential units in its history; moreover, new forms of planning and community participation were being tested through the formation of cooperative building and housing associations, *kooperative boligbyggelag*.¹⁷ These cooperatives were formed by groups of like-minded individuals who teamed together to seek funding and architectural services for communal housing projects. In some cases, future residents later on became involved in the process. The democratic ideals which encouraged residents to be involved in shaping their own homes led to a number of Norwegian housing experiments in the 1970s, where the problem of participation was addressed in various ways.

Deregulation of the housing market in the 1980s saw a general shift away from community participation toward individual aspiration. This new mind-set was, in turn, exploited by developers, who responded to the market with build-to-order business models.¹⁸ More recently, participation has at times taken the form of market canvassing and been used to gain political leverage.¹⁹

The 1970s, democratising design

Planners, architects and advisors must re-evaluate their protective attitude and entrust important decisions to the public [...] new principles must be developed [...] A residential area should reflect the different residents interests, wishes and hopes, and

not be dominated by the authorities, manufacturers and planners.²⁰

(Tryggve Mjøset and Tore Brantenberg)

In the early 1970s, public participation in housing design became a hot topic in Norway. Swedish experiments in participation, such as Experimenthuseti Järnbrott, Gothenburg (1953),²¹ where residents were assisted in designing their own apartments; Eksperimenthusi Kvarteret Diset, Uppsala (1964),²² featuring a free plan and moveable walls, and Konvaljen, Kalmar (1967),²³ where questionnaires and catalogues gave choice and information to residents, all proved inspirational, as did the works of other Europeans, such as Ralph Erskine and his approach to participatory planning at Byker Wall Estate (1968)²⁴ in Newcastle. Participation was seen as a vibrant, inclusive ideal to strive toward. Stimulated by the events and politics of the day, a number of Norwegian architects began to discuss and explore local possibilities, taking as their reference vernacular models of development in which people had planned and built their own communities, often without expert help. The issue of participation was discussed locally by Mjøset and Brantenberg in a 1974 report which stated that 'It is a logical consequence [that] everyone who is affected by a decision ought to be able to influence it, if we are to reach a full and vibrant democracy'.²⁵

Risvollan, Trondheim. 1970-74

Norway's largest housing cooperative was realised as the result of a competition staged by the municipality of Trondheim in 1966.²⁶ [fig. 1] The winning designs for the site at Risvollan were developed with reference to Garden City principles by Brantenberg, Cold & Hiorthøy. The site was divided into eight zones, each with a children's play area, and totalled 1118 units. The project aimed to create a whole community, not just houses, since the designs included a community centre, shops and other services.²⁷



Fig. 1



Fig. 2

Fig. 1: Risvollan, Trondheim, 1974 by Brantenberg, Cold & Hiorthøy. © Brigit Cold
Fig. 2: Hagtussa Borettslag, Tjensvoll, Stavanger, 1976 by Brantenberg, Cold & Hiorthøy. © Brigit Cold

Since the project was the result of a competition staged by the municipality and not designed directly for the eventual occupants, questions were raised as to how the development could meet the individual needs and aspirations of its inhabitants. The architects began to address these concerns by putting their designs out to public consultation.

In the summer of 1969, an exhibition was staged to both inform the public about the proposed designs for Risvollan and to gather their reactions to the project by means of a questionnaire.²⁸ In order for visitors to have a better understanding of the spaces provided in the new housing, one floor of a terrace was built full scale. This 1:1 model included a kitchen, living room, bathroom and two bedrooms, which the public was free to walk around in and experience before submitting their answers to a detailed questionnaire.

In total, 40,000 people visited the exhibition, which aimed at establishing lines of contact with future residents. The completed questionnaires were studied by the Institute for Psychology and Social Sciences at Norges Tekniske Høgskole, NTH.²⁹ It was documented that a large number of the visitors to the exhibition agreed in principle with the proposed site configuration, flexibility and traffic solutions.

Following Risvollan, the same architects designed 282 residential units at Haugtussa in Stavanger.³⁰ [fig. 2] Here they assumed that building adaptability into a standardised unit would allow future residents to take control over their spaces themselves, as and when required in the future.

Whilst both Risvollen and Haugtussa were designed with an awareness of their future residents and with intentions for built-in adaptability, they were both developer-led projects initiated by local municipalities.

Selegrend, Bergen. 1974-81

In contrast to the works of Brantenberg, Cold & Hiorthøy, the future residents of Selegrend 1 in Bergen directly shaped the design of their new homes and community. The Selegrend Housing Cooperative, established in 1970, was based on a number of ideological objectives. The members of the cooperative believed that individuals ought to have the power to influence their own living situation, and that a neighbourhood should reflect a diverse social mix and be designed in such a way that cooperation was encouraged. This was done in the belief that it would give residents an increased sense of belonging. Alongside a desire for resident participation in the design process was a greater communal objective that people support each other: the Cooperative believed that the average person with enough resources had a responsibility to assist those with less.³¹

The design for Selegrend 1 was determined in the course of a number of meetings between the cooperative and the architects, Cubus. Not only were the future residents required to participate, they were also in charge of decision-making.³² The project aimed at social inclusion, therefore the development tried to accommodate a broad social mix, which was one of the key themes discussed at the Cooperative-architect meetings. Through these meetings it was also decided that dense, small housing best suited the site and their joint intentions. The architects drew plans for two suggested proposals and the cooperative voted for their favourite. Although each house adhered to standard dimensions, residents were free to design the internal layout of their future house with help from the architect, as long as it met with the State Housing Bank's rules. The doors, stairs and windows had to be chosen from a range, but could be arranged as desired.³³ [fig. 3] In addition to their input during the planning stages, residents were also required to help with the upkeep, improvement and care of the whole development, not only their



Fig. 3



Fig. 4

Fig. 3: Selegrend, Hesthaugen, Bergen, 1974 by CUBUS A/L. © Brigit Cold
Fig. 4: Nordås, Bergen, 1977 by CUBUS A/L. © Helse Bergen

own home. This work took the form of community volunteering events.

The second phase at Selegrend, Nordås, was built in 1981. [fig. 4] Here, many of the residents contributed their time and labour in the construction of the scheme, and today residents still invest time in the improvement of their communal spaces. Each family was required to contribute eighty hours of work per year; if they did not, then they had to pay for the missing time.³⁴

The developments at Selegrend demonstrated a fairly intense participatory requirement, which was perhaps an attitude very much suited to the times, with a strong egalitarian identity. There were potential advantages for inhabitants, such as a heightened sense of community spirit; however, there were also many expectations placed upon them, including the time they were required to dedicate to the scheme.

Bromstad B, Trondheim. 1972-74

Whereas Selegrend expected inhabitants to be active members of a community, Bromstad B, in Trondheim, required them to become developers responsible for the construction of their new homes.³⁵ The project tested how 'hands-on' people were willing to become in order to gain their dream home. The focus of the project was not on the communal aspects of the finished scheme but rather upon giving people the power to directly influence the design of their own homes.

The site layout for Bromstad B was designed by Drageset, Røe and Skarland and comprised thirty-nine units of terraced housing. The intention to undertake a participation process was advertised in the local press. Twenty-three families registered to take part and founded the housing cooperative. Since the overall site layout had already been determined, participation was limited to influencing a single house. The families received a questionnaire and a written description of the project.

The architects designed the houses in relation to the completed questionnaires and each family agreed that they would bear the responsibility for construction.³⁶

The project had a number of broad goals: each family was to have a degree of influence over the design of their house in direct collaboration with the architect, and each should construct (self-build) part of the house themselves but could employ contractors if needed. To ensure a degree of cohesion across the designs, standard plan types, construction systems, materials and detailing were used.

The architects showed the families plans with images of built examples and the families chose the ideas they liked. This, combined with the information about space and family size, financing, individual input, and other design issues gathered by the questionnaires, assisted the design of individual sketch proposals for each family. These proposals were shown and discussed during an open meeting for all the families. The architects held one to one discussions with each family to decide upon the details of each house. Finally, another open meeting was held to discuss technical details, logistics and contracts before construction began.

At Bromstad B, each family decided how much or how little of their new home they were going to build themselves. In the end, three families did very little, three built the whole thing from scratch, while the majority of residents took the middle ground and made a fair contribution to the construction.

The 1980s onwards, a deregulated market

Prior to the 1980s, Norwegian housing policy was social democratic in character, as Stamsø reports. This meant that 'universal housing goals were implemented by regulating rents, prices and interest rates, combined with widespread object subsidies that affected a largely owner-occupied sector'.³⁷ However, in 1981, when the conservative

party (Høyre) came to power, moves were made toward developing a private, market-driven housing sector. Subsidies were cut and the market took the dominant position. In turn, as discussed by another economist, Orderud, homebuilders became market players, 'irrespective of whether they were organised as co-operative housing associations, privately owned companies or stock companies.'³⁸

The discovery of oil in Norwegian territory led to new wealth amongst the people of a previously poor country, and the timing of this new affluence allowed the public to dive wholeheartedly into the excesses of the 1980s. The shift, as described below by the journalist Erling Læg Reid, was profound:

That a sober farming people like the Norwegians would go off the rails more than anyone else is almost unbelievable, but it is true. We bought the most expensive cars, the most expensive watches, the fanciest clothes, we cancelled all credit checks, we bought apartments of one hundred and eight square meters with one bedroom and three bathrooms, including a jacuzzi, but no sauna. We built ourselves up to a life of eternal youth and partying, completely without responsibility.³⁹

Læg Reid also satirically observed that the Norwegian excesses of the 80s can be compared to an awkward phase of national puberty.⁴⁰ The analogy may well be fitting: it was, after all, the time that saw the nation begin to rapidly outgrow her big brother, Sweden. However, puberty is also the time that tastes and identity develop, so it would not be surprising if those years proved to be formative.

Build your own home

It would be fair to say that in the course of the 1980s Norway underwent a cultural revolution.⁴¹ A new mind-set evolved, which rejected housing cooperatives as embarrassing reminders of a less moneyed past and promoted the idea of personal liberty achieved through private home ownership.

Legislation was developed which supported the rights of the individual to build what they wanted on their own land. The Building and Planning Act of 1985 (dubbed by some the 'yes law') made it difficult for plans to be refused and set no standard for participation.⁴² Development did not generally occur within a considered template or framework, which led, at times, to haphazard suburban sprawl.

The growing economy and relaxed legislation of the 1980s gave homebuyers greater opportunities to get the exact house they wanted. In response to this demand, property developers built homes to order. Homebuyers could participate in choosing their ideal home and take part in the actual construction or finishing. Their new wealth meant that they were no longer bound to housing cooperatives and subsidies, and consequently they were not bound by the rules of the State Housing Bank either.

When deciding upon how to get a house built, future homebuyers had three options: standard, catalogue or bespoke. For a standard house (Typehus), the homebuyer could buy a site in a planned development. Here they would either be bound to a design or could choose from a limited range offered by the developer. They would not be able to alter the main structure, but would have the freedom to influence certain aspects of the plan and choose windows and fittings.

If this was too restrictive, the homebuyer could choose instead to build a catalogue house (kataloghus). [fig. 5] This required the purchase of their own site, then the selection of a model from the developers' catalogues which they could customise to their own taste. Since this option meant they were not tied to a larger development, they could regulate the building process themselves. A further option was to buy a site and then hire an architect to draw a house, or draw it themselves based on examples from the catalogues. Of the three options, this brought the greatest freedom but also the

greatest responsibility.

Typically, the residents of these suburban detached homes had little interest in community; indeed, researchers discovered that, on the whole, residents preferred to distance themselves from their neighbours.⁴⁴ The main interaction that did occur was through the children, their friends, and after school activities.

In 1995, a study conducted by Eli Støa examined the views of the inhabitants of fourteen different 1980s suburban homes and their notions of the ideal home.⁴⁵ The home owners interviewed were asked about why and how they had participated in the development of their homes. The research concluded that they associated their homes with 'freedom, privacy, control and a happy family life'.⁴⁶ They also felt that by customising their homes to their taste they had participated actively and produced a home which represented them more than if they had bought something ready built.

Thus, deregulation of the housing market and a new found wealth in the 1980s saw cooperative housing fall out of favour. Instead, it became popular to seek freedom, privacy and profit, with many aspiring to the ownership of a large, detached, built-to-order suburban home. Although participation was not encouraged amongst communities, developers realised that their customers wanted some degree of control over their surroundings and so allowed them to customise their properties to varying degrees.

Elvehavn Brygge, Trondheim. 2002

Deregulation of the housing market saw a change in housing policy in Norway. The housing sector shifted from publicly subsidised owner occupation to a private, market-driven sector.⁴⁷ This resulted in dramatic increases in house prices, and also a change in how homes were procured, financed and constructed. In what may seem a logical

progression, developers soon became involved in participation strategies. Upon recent questioning about this policy, a third of the developers involved in the study responded that it gave a better final result, whereas 45% believed that it gave them strategic leverage to assist in gaining political backing.⁴⁸

As an example of developer involvement in a public participation project, Elvehavn Brygge in Trondheim reveals how the differing agendas of key actors can combine. Nedre Elvehavn is an area of recent development in Trondheim. [fig. 6] It consists of high-density, new build housing blocks, refurbished industrial spaces transformed into shops and cafes, and a new office block and hotel. The development is in a central location that appeals primarily to young adults.

In response to a competition that was staged for the development plan, a research project was set up in 2002. It took the form of a collaboration project aimed at future users with young families and was called *Barn I Byen* (Children in the City). Collaboration involved architects, developers, estate agents, Sintef, NTNU, Husbanken and the local municipality.⁴⁹

The participation project was designed so that potential future homebuyers could be involved in the development of the design of their homes. At the same time, it was intended to give confidence to the developers who, as yet, were unsure as to whether there was a market for new family homes in the city centre.

A group of future users were gathered through responses to adverts in various local media channels. The level to which they could participate was limited to the later stages of the design. The density, infrastructure, footprint, construction system, material use and aesthetic had already been decided upon. The participation process comprised five workshops, one group discussion regarding design,



Fig. 5



Fig. 6

Fig. 5: A popular catalogue house in the 1980s: Block 99 by Block Watne. © Kjell Ove Storvik
Fig. 6: Elvehavn Brygge, Trondheim, 2002. Masterplan by Skibnes Arkitekter AS. © author

to which the architect responded in a later session, a questionnaire, and a final meeting and exhibition open to the public. During the process, the future residents wrote wish lists of what they wanted for their homes, the outdoor spaces, the common areas and the neighbourhood. The resultant lists were extensive. On many issues, the group had differing views and so their input was treated as individual and not collective and the architect designed with that in mind.

At the last workshop, nine of the families were present to give their ideas and requests as to how the development ought to be designed. These included their views on mix, layout of common areas, provision of a nursery school, outdoor spaces, parking and ownership.

The future users were generally pleased with the process; they felt that they had been listened and responded to. The participation process was deemed a success in the summary report written upon its completion. It transpired, however, that for many of the families involved in the process, cost was the defining factor, whereas for others, the time scale of the project did not suit their immediate requirements for accommodation. In the end, none of the group purchased an apartment in the new development that was constructed.

The participation project gave young families the chance to discuss how they would like to live, and politically, the participation project was perceived as having been a positive initiative. As a consequence, a dense and valuable development got a family-friendly edge. The researchers collected a lot of field data, and the participants got the 'services of an architect to design a home (for free)'.⁵⁰

The information provided by the Elvehavn Brygge participation project can perhaps be considered as a form of market canvassing; after all, most of the key decisions, such as form, density and aesthetic,

had already been taken. However, it may also be regarded as an attempt to gain political leverage for the developer, a subsidiary company that funded 40% of the research.⁵¹ It is unlikely that such an amount would have been financed solely out of curiosity.

How can participation become relevant today?

From the examples given in this paper, it would appear that the agenda governing participation in Norway has changed over the years. Following World War I, exhibitions and lectures were used to inform the public about the benefits of good housing on health. Through education, the general public were encouraged to take an interest in their environment.

At Risvollan, an exhibition and 1:1 model was used to give members of the public the opportunity to experience the housing units before they were built. They were, however, not only informed about the development but also consulted on their opinion of it. The questionnaires that the visitors filled in did not impact the design directly, they came too late in the process for that, but they did show a willingness to listen; fortunately, the public agreed, in principle, with the questions they were asked.

At Selegrend, the actions of a highly driven housing cooperative saw participation leap up the ladder from informing and consulting to citizen control. A strong group of like-minded individuals received financial support from the State Housing Bank and worked together with architects to make their ideal community. The overall concept and site layout was discussed and decided upon as a group, which meant the architects could initially treat the group as their client. Subsequently, small deviations were made from the standard modules, thereby giving each family in the cooperative a degree of freedom. Everyone who chose to live at Selegrend signed up to become part of an active community; they took pride not just in their individual homes but

also in their neighbourhood. The founding objective of the cooperative – that those with resources should assist those without – plus the requirement for participation in voluntary work, most likely helped to ensure that those who joined the scheme shared a similar view of the world, which was not, however, necessarily appealing to everyone.

As previously mentioned, Norway has an individualistic society. So, whilst a project like Selegrend can demonstrate a vibrant community spirit and shared citizen control, it is perhaps not the way that most people would choose to live. This is where the appeal of a project like Bromstad B becomes clear. Since the overall site layout had been designed before the public became involved, participation was limited to influencing a single house. Whilst those who signed up were all part of a participation process, there was no pressure put on them to shape a community, or indeed to agree. They did, however, need to take responsibility for themselves and make sure their respective homes got built.

Selegrend and Bromstad may be seen to represent two very different types of housing cooperatives. The funding that both projects received from the State Housing Bank set the standard for the quality of the housing, but it did not set any specific requirement for participation. This was decided upon by the cooperatives themselves. At Selegrend, there was a holistic community vision, whereas at Bromstad, there appeared to be a more practical arrangement, whereby the sharing of a common plan, plus individual input, made the prospect of homeownership more affordable.

Through the establishment of the State Housing Bank, the Norwegian government not only subsidised housing but also promoted the ideal of homeownership for all citizens. In this way, the public came to aspire to own their home. The deregulation of the market in the 1980s created a financial incentive to become a homeowner. In turn,

as wealth began to filter down through society as a result of the discovery of oil, it is hardly surprising that people went out and bought new homes.

Since these new homes were largely self-funded, the rules devised by the State Housing Bank no longer applied. There were opportunities to build whatever one liked or could afford. There was no longer a requirement to seek group funding from the State Housing Bank, or to establish or join a cooperative if there was no real need to participate in one.

For those who wanted to join a cooperative, for financial, social or ideological reasons, this was still possible. However, the tide of general public aspiration had moved toward the 'self-built' suburban home. Since homebuyers could customise their homes, many felt as though they had actively participated in the building process. In turn, these homes were associated with freedom, privacy and happiness. Whilst this may not be what most people associate with participation, it can be argued that these citizens were at the top of Arnstein's Ladder.

If housing production had remained at this scale, no doubt suburban sprawl would still have continued, for as long as there were plots of land available, homeowners felt empowered by customising their own homes. However, deregulation of the housing market also saw the rise of the private developer and a leap in scale.

It is this change in scale, in conjunction with developers assuming the role of middlemen, which has seen participation used as a means of gaining leverage. The example at Elvehavn Brygge demonstrates how a participation project can be used politically to add a family-friendly edge without necessarily giving any decision-making powers to the participants.

As Norwegian cities grow and densify, there

is an issue of power and scale. While it may be considered reasonable for an individual to influence a small project (like their own home), how can every individual voice be accommodated in larger developments? How people want to live cannot be dictated by the state, and private developers do not necessarily have the public's best interests in mind. So, whilst in theory participation may sound like a good idea, finding effective techniques and subjects for participation across scales is, in practice, more of a challenge.

Perhaps part of the problem is that participation has been understood as a method for getting what we want. At Risvollan, questionnaires were used to establish whether the public approved of the scheme. At Selegrend, future residents participated in an ideologically driven attempt to shape the sort of homes and community they collectively wanted. At Bromstad, participants were tested to see how hard they were willing to work to get what they wanted – would they build it all themselves? The subsequent success of the 'build to order' housing models from the 80s onwards derived from offering customers a framework of options from which to choose exactly what they wanted, restricted only by what they could afford. It is therefore not surprising that in the more recent project at Elvehavn Brygge, the participation process was conducted in such a way that everyone who took part got something out of it: families gained free professional advice, researchers gathered data, politicians received positive press reports, and the developers most likely saw a good return on their investment. Nevertheless, the dialogue, which took place at a number of levels, operated at cross-purposes. A further issue in the participation process at Elvehavn Brygge was the lack of consensus: even among the families there was no willingness to compromise on their respective 'wish lists'.

From these examples it would seem that participatory design has moved from seeking common threads to generating individual specifications. If no pressure existed on land use and there was no need to share, then no problem might arise. However, the densification of our cities generates varied points of view and agendas. How can any sort of agreement be reached if we do not participate at least to some degree?

A major impulse of the modern Norwegian era was toward goals of equality, democracy and fairness in the city and at home. However, to assume that we can achieve unity through talking, especially when there is now so much money at stake, is unrealistic to say the least. This does not mean that participation processes cannot be useful – simply that we cannot assume that they are good; it is redundant to think of them as being imbued with any set of values or ideals, that tide has turned. Relevance is not to be found in educating or swaying participants, but may instead be developed through fostering discussion, negotiating compromises and even generating new, perhaps unexpected, knowledge.

Notes

1. A series of interviews with developers and planners has revealed imbalances in power and participation in urban planning in Norway. Inger-Lise Saglieog, Eva Falleth, 'Makt og medvirkning i urbanreguleringsplanlegging', PLAN: *Tidskrift for samfunnsplannlegging, bolig og byplan og regional utbygging* (2010: Nr1), pp. 64 - 67. In Norwegian.
2. A report was published in 2007 by a Norwegian architects/consultancy called Asplan Viak. The title of the report can be translated as, 'Does Participation Actually Work?': Arthur Wøhni, *Virker medvirkning virkelig?: evaluering av planmedvirkning i storbyene: sluttrapport* (Sandvika: Asplan Viak, 2007). In Norwegian.
3. In February 2011, a debate was published by the national journal for Norwegian architecture,

- Arkitektnytt*, highlighting an ongoing discussion amongst the country's architects. It was titled, 'Does Participation Work?' The premise of the argument that it did not, was outlined by a social anthropologist, who stated that 'to think that people want to engage actively is little more than a naive notion'. Some architects were quick to respond, claiming that interest in city planning was growing and a belief in participation ought not to be lost. They did admit, however, that the perfect solution or method for participation had not yet been found. See: <<http://www.arkitektnytt.no/virker-medvirkning>> [accessed 01 January 2013]. In Norwegian.
4. Sherry R. Arnstein, 'A Ladder of Citizen Participation', *Journal of the American Institute of Planners*, 35, 4 (July 1969), pp. 216–24.
 5. The legislation discussed is § 5-1. Medvirkning, <<http://www.lovdatabank.no/all/tl-20080627-071-008.html#5-1>> [accessed 01 July 2013]. In Norwegian.
 6. Hans Ulrich Obrist, 'Participation Lasts Forever', in *Did Someone Say Participate? An Atlas of Spatial Practice*, ed. by M. Miessen & S. Basar, (Cambridge Mass.: MIT Press, 2006), p. 18.
 7. Sherry Arnstein, 'A Ladder of Citizen Participation', pp. 216-224.
 8. *Ibid.*, p. 216.
 9. *Ibid.*, p. 217.
 10. Markus Miessen, Shumon Basar, 'Introduction: Did We Mean Participate or Did We Mean Something Else?', in *Did Someone Say Participate? An Atlas of Spatial Practice*, eds. Miessen and Basar (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2006), p. 23.
 11. An interesting recent example is the Wikihouse by 00:/ Architects, <<http://www.wikihouse.cc/library/users/14003>> [accessed 01 July 2013].
 12. Nicolas Bourriand, *Relational Aesthetics*, trans. by Simon Pleasance & Fronza Woods (Dijon: Les presses du réel, 2002), p. 70.
 13. *Ibid.*, p. 31.
 14. Elsa Reiersen & Elisabeth Thue, *De tusenhjem: Den norske stats husbank 1946-96* (Oslo: Ad notam Gyldendal, 1996), p. 30. In Norwegian.
 15. Mary Ann Stamsø, 'Housing and the Welfare State in Norway', *Scandinavian Political Studies*, 32, 2 (June 2009), p. 207.
 16. Elsa Reiersen & Elisabeth Thue, *De tusenhjem: Den norske stats husbank 1946-96*, p. 12.
 17. For a more comprehensive account of the history of housing associations, <<http://www.nbbl.no/Om-NBBL/Boligsamvirkets-historie>> [accessed 01 July 2013]. In Norwegian.
 18. An example of a house menu can be found here: <<http://www.norgeshus.no/hus/>> [accessed 01 January 2013]. In Norwegian.
 19. Inger-Lise Saglieog and Eva Falleth, 'Makt og medvirkning i urbanreguleringsplanlegging', pp. 64-67.
 20. Tryggve Mjøset and Tore Brantenberg, *Brukerog Bolig: Om påvirkningogmedvirkningipraksis* (Oslo/Trondheim: Norcem Seminaretved Bygg Reis Deg, 1974), p. 32, [translation by author].
 21. Tage and Anders William-Olsson, 'Eksperimenthuseti Göteborg', *Byggmästaren*, 1945, pp. 52-61. In Swedish.
 22. Marianne Dahlbäck, 'Erik Fribergeselementhus, Våningstomthusi Kallebäck', *Arkitektur* (s) 7, 8 (1971), pp. 3-16. In Swedish.
 23. Bertil Olsson and Rolf Nilsson, *Anpassbara Bostäder Flerfamiljshus – undersökning av experimenthusikv. Diset, Uppsala, ochjämförelser med liknandeprojekt* (Stockholm: Statensinstitutförbyggnadsforskning, 1970). In Swedish.
 24. Peter Blundell Jones and Eamonn Canniffe, *Modern Architecture Through Case Studies 1945 to 1990* (London: Elsevier, 2007), pp. 139-52.
 25. Tryggve Mjøset and Tore Brantenberg, *Brukerog Bolig: Om påvirkningogmedvirkningipraksis*, p. 9, [translation by author].
 26. Risvollan Borettslag - Byggesaken 7 beslutning-sprosessen, <http://www.risvollan-borettslag.no/public_files/docs/Infohandbok%20kap%202.1.pdf> [accessed 01 January 2013]. In Norwegian.
 27. Tore Brantenberg, *Hus ihage: privatlivogfelleskapsmåog store boligområder* (Oslo: Den Norske Stats Husbank, 2002), pp. 119-25. In Norwegian.
 28. Risvollan Borettslag - Byggesaken 7 beslutning-sprosessen, <<http://www.risvollan-borettslag.no/>>

- public_files/docs/Infohandbok%20kap%202.1.pdf> [accessed 01 January 2013].
29. Ibid.
30. Haugtussa Borettslag, Tjensvoll, <<http://apps.husbanken.no/boligbasen/050d.htm>> [accessed 01 January 2013]. In Norwegian.
31. Tore Brantenberg, *Hus ihage: privatlivogfelleskapsmåog store boligområder*, pp. 135-39.
32. Ibid.
33. Ibid.
34. Nordås Selegreng Borettslag, <<http://www.nordasgrenda.no/>> [accessed 01 January 2013]. In Norwegian.
35. Sidsel Laupstad, *Boligprosjektering som åpen prosess: Et forsøk på å belyse prosjekteringsprosessen ut fra forutsetning om brukervedvirkning Del VI Eksempelsamling* (Trondheim: NTH PhD Thesis, 1990) §33. In Norwegian.
36. Ibid.
37. Mary Ann Stamsø, 'Housing and the Welfare State in Norway', *Scandinavian Political Studies*, 32, 2 (June 2009), pp. 204-05.
38. Geir Inge Orderud, 'Finance, Home Building and Urban Residential Structuring', *Antipode*, 43, 4 (September 2011), p. 1224.
39. Erling Lægreid, *Då Noreg gjekk av skaffet. Hogg i 80 åras elleville historie* (Oslo: Det Norske Samlaget, 1993), p. 14.
40. Ibid.
41. As discussed by Thomas Hylland Eriksen, 'Norway Went Crazy. Åttitalls kulturrevolusjon' in *Typisk Norsk Essays om kulturen i Norge* (Oslo: C.Huitfeldt forlag AS, 1993) (Oslo: C.Huitfeldtforlag AS, 1993).
42. The 1985 legislation can be found at <<http://www.lovddata.no/o11/n1-19850614-077.html>> [accessed 01 July 2013]. In Norwegian.
43. Eli Støa, 'Boliger og kultur. Norske boligfelt på 1980-tallet sett i lys av beboernes boligidealer' (Trondheim: NTH PhD Thesis, 1996), p. 188.
44. Ibid.
45. Ibid., p. v.
46. Ibid., p. vii.
47. Geir Inge Orderud, 'Finance, Home Building 46. and Urban Residential Structuring', pp.1215-49.
48. Inger-Lise Saglieog and Eva Falleth, 'Makt og medvirkning i urbanreguleringsplanlegging', p. 65.
49. Eli Støa, *Familieboliger på Elvehavn Brygge - Medvirkningsprosjekt*. (Trondheim: Sintef Bygg og Miljø, August 2003). In Norwegian.
50. Ibid., p. 27, [translation by author].
51. On page 9 of the report, KaibbyggAS is listed as financing 40% of the research. A business search of Kaibbygg reveals that they have the same contact address as Skanska Bolig AS, the private developers. See <<http://www.proff.no/selskap/kaibbygg-i-nedre-elvehavn-as/oslo/-/880897152/>> [accessed 01 July 2013]. Subsidiary companies with no employees can be established by developers in order to limit liability.

Biography

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